

**OUR MISSION:** To strengthen the whole community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of immigrants

## Pipeline Scholars and Police Build Trust & Break Stereotypes



*Graduation ceremony in Mount Kisco for participants of the Family & Police Initiative. Special thanks to Commissioner of Public Safety Tom Gleason, Deputy Commissioner of Department of Social Services John Befus and Lieutenant Michael Cindrich for their support of this program.*

The Family & Police Initiative is a groundbreaking program designed to build trust, break down stereotypes and improve communication between local police and the communities they serve. Neighbors Link recently partnered with the North American Family Institute (NAFI), Westchester County Department of Social Services, Westchester County Public Safety Department and the Ossining Police Department to bring this program to our community. Over several weeks in both Ossining and Mount Kisco, police and families from Neighbors Link's Pipeline Scholars program participated in a variety of exercises and activities to open lines of communication, including role playing, sharing backgrounds and asking honest and difficult questions. By sharing preconceived notions and personal stories, participants found common ground and built mutual respect. The training was led by Dr. Jim Isenberg and Don Wiede of NAFI and Carola Otero Bracco and Rebecca Sussman from Neighbors Link.

"The most encouraging part of this program is the active engagement of local

families and police together. I want to commend the chiefs of both departments and the families that participated in this work," said Dr. Jim Isenberg of NAFI.

"Many immigrant families understandably fear any interactions with police officers," explains Carola Otero Bracco, Executive Director of Neighbors Link. "This program allows families and police to break the cycle of mutual mistrust and open lines of communication."



*Ossining police officers and families role play a situation in which the officers were the driver and passenger in a car that was stopped by the police officers, role played by the youth and parent.*



# Police and Social Services Working Together



DSS staff and Yonkers police officers join together in a closing circle after completing the training.

Police officers and social service employees both work in challenging situations, providing urgent services to people in need and trying to ensure the safety and well-being of the whole community. Since the work of these groups can often overlap, it is important to ensure that there is regular communication and trust.

Staff from the Westchester County Department of Social Services (DSS) and Yonkers and Mount Vernon police departments recently attended trainings led by Neighbors Link and the North American Family Institute (NAFI). The trainings (one for Yonkers DSS staff and police and one for Mount Vernon DSS staff and police) addressed issues of cultural differences, cultural awareness and institutional bias, with a goal of developing trust and improving communication.

Each training started with a discussion of assumptions that people make about DSS staff and police officers and a more in-depth understanding of what each actually do in their jobs each day. Through role plays and sharing stories, participants were able to open up about challenges they each face in fulfilling their jobs. They also shared how stereotypes, generalizations, and conscious and unconscious bias impact the populations that they serve.

DSS Deputy Commissioner

John Befus commented that “this training helped participants understand the pressures and challenges we all face in this work. We were reminded that we are more similar than different. We really do have shared goals and outcomes, most importantly the safety and the well-being of our community.”

Police Officer Angela Vignogna #1050 of the Yonkers Police Department, Third Precinct, South Broadway Post said that “this training provided me with a greater respect and awareness of the stressors and false perceptions that we,

as a team of individuals ultimately working towards the same goal, must endure on a daily basis. Being afforded the opportunity to break down stereotypes and barriers by learning and educating ourselves is a valuable asset that I believe can be used to enhance my ability to perform my duties as a police officer. I am grateful to have been provided this opportunity to make new friends and to enhance the communication channels to work together as a team for the greater good for the residents of the City of Yonkers.”

At the end of each session, DSS staff and police officers came together in a closing circle to share what they had learned and how they could implement this training in their daily work.

We are grateful to the many people who made this training possible, including Mount Vernon Police Commissioner Shawn Harris, Yonkers Police Commissioner Charles Gardner and Westchester County DSS Commissioner Kevin McGuire.



DSS Staff and Mount Vernon police join together for a photo after the training.



## Office for New Americans

As an Office for New Americans Opportunity Center, Neighbors Link has helped **344** people apply for citizenship since April 2016.

# Westchester Board of Legislators Passes Bill to Protect Employees

Wage theft is a significant problem in Westchester County. Although it occurs across sectors, it is particularly prevalent in the home improvement sector, including landscaping, gardening, painting and construction. Wage theft occurs when employees do not receive their legally or contractually promised wages. This can mean employees not being paid at all, not receiving minimum wage, not receiving overtime pay or not being paid for all the hours worked.








On November 19th, the Westchester County Board of Legislators unanimously approved the Home Improvement Licensing Law Amendment, which discourages home improvement businesses from engaging in wage theft and strengthens protections for both employees and consumers. The new law requires the county to take into account judgements against businesses for non-payment or under-payment of employees when considering new license applications or license renewals. The law also requires applicants to disclose any business-related judgements against them, especially if they involve wage-related judgments.

Neighbors Link is proud to be a member of the Westchester Labor Alliance (Alianza Laboral), a network of community-based, non-profit organizations that serve the immigrant population and advocate for protections for all workers.



Westchester County Executive George Latimer signs the Home Improvement Licensing Law Amendment.

## 2018 BY THE NUMBERS

4,000 IMMIGRANTS SERVED	
	Over <b>1,400</b> parents and children enrolled in Family Center programs
	Over <b>800</b> learners participated in English as a Second Language classes
	The Worker Center facilitated jobs for nearly <b>600</b> workers with over <b>1,400</b> employers
	Neighbors Link Community Law Practice handled <b>172</b> complex legal cases
	<b>400</b> volunteers (half high school students) made our programming possible
	Over <b>2,400</b> residents attended <i>Know Your Rights</i> and other community engagement programs
	<b>125</b> people received legal assistance applying for U.S. citizenship or DACA status





## LEARNING ABOUT NATURE

Above, A naturalist from Westmoreland Sanctuary recently visited our Parent-Child Together group at Dayspring Community Center in Yonkers. Families had the opportunity to interact and learn about each animal together.

## LATIN LINKS

Below, Leon Rodriguez, Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) from 2014-2017, was the keynote speaker at our Latin Links luncheon. He gave an inspiring talk on immigration policy and what we all can do to impact policy in the future.



# NEIGHBORS & FRIENDS

## LEARNING TOGETHER

At our center in Ossining long-term residents sit side by side with newer neighbors, not only practicing English language skills, but forging friendships and making our community stronger.



## LOVING LIBRARIES

Libraries are important partners in our Family Center programming. One of our Parent-Child Together classes recently visited the Mount Kisco Public Library to enjoy bilingual storytime and to give parents an opportunity to sign up for library cards.

## HOLIDAY MARKET

THANK YOU to everyone who donated, volunteered and participated in our annual Mercado de las Fiestas (Holiday Market) in December. Parents selected gifts for over 800 children; 60 volunteers came to help out, and over 1,000 toys and other items were donated!







## Portrait of a Neighbor: Alex

It is never an easy decision to leave home, but sometimes circumstances make the decision necessary. Fleeing violence in his home country of Guatemala, Alex arrived in the United States in 2002. Since his arrival 17 years ago, he has been a valuable member of our community. Understanding the importance of education, he immediately enrolled in English and computer classes and worked hard to receive his GED. Alex now works two jobs to support himself and his family. He also participates in his church and volunteers as a coach for his son's soccer team.

In 2013, Alex turned to an immigration attorney for information about legalizing his status in the United States. Without his knowledge, that immigration attorney placed Alex in deportation proceedings and swindled him out of thousands of dollars.

Neighbors Link Community Law Practice began representing Alex in 2014. After years of work obtaining records, preparing affidavits and letters on Alex's behalf and preparing testimony, Alex's case went to trial in 2018. He was granted cancellation of removal and will be eligible for a green card when a visa becomes available. This success allows Alex to remain in the United States with his wife and children so that they may continue to reap the benefits of his hard work and build a successful life here together. We are thrilled that Alex and his family will be able to continue making valuable contributions to our community.



## Portrait of a Neighbor: Legal Volunteers

Meeting the enormous and rising demand for immigration related legal services is a challenge that is made easier by the dedication and commitment of our legal volunteers. Currently 11 volunteers (including 9 lawyers) are regularly volunteering their time and talent with Neighbors Link Community Law Practice. They assist in completing immigration applications, compiling court filings, conducting legal research, drafting legal briefs, motions and memoranda, meeting with clients and drafting affidavits and statements in support of immigration applications.

"Our volunteers are invaluable in the support they provide to our legal department. They significantly expand our capacity and allow us to assist more clients who are in need due to the changes in policies and laws under this administration," explained Elizabeth Mastropolo, Esq., Managing Attorney, Neighbors Link Community Law Practice.

Susan Weisert is a regular volunteer who provides enormous support to our legal team through her translation skills and her willingness to step in and get things done. For Susan, "every story we hear and each person we have the opportunity to meet is so unique and special. It is a privilege to be here, to hopefully be making an impact and making sure that people feel supported."

*Photo above: Volunteer attorney Robin Capaccio working with clients on safety plans.*

# WORKERS AVAILABLE AT NEIGHBORS LINK

Skilled and general labor available: House and Yard Clean-Up, Moving Help, Housekeeping, Snow Shoveling, Painters, Home Companions, Carpenters, Masons, Party Help and more



Neighbors Link Worker Center is open 365 days a year, 7am-10pm  
27 Columbus Avenue, Mount Kisco, NY 10549  
914-666-3410 • [www.neighborslink.org](http://www.neighborslink.org)



The Friends of Neighbors Link invite you to our Annual Benefit / **MAY 4, 2019, 6:00 PM**

Honoring Jackie Mann and  
The Elias Foundation  
The Gabby Rosenfeld Be a Hero Award:  
Paul & Shodie Alcorn

CELEBRATING OUR BEAUTIFUL MOSAIC

Brae Burn Country Club, Purchase, NY  
Dinner & Dancing

Tickets: [www.NeighborsLink.org](http://www.NeighborsLink.org) or (914) 666-3410 ext 114

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27 Columbus Avenue  
Mount Kisco, NY 10549  
Tel: 914-666-3410  
[www.neighborslink.org](http://www.neighborslink.org)

